



## Increasing Strain and Stress to Women due to lockdown

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“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its woman.”

J. L. Nehru-

First prime minister of India Women are worshipped as education deity in India; are considered symbol of love, affection and care. Ancient scriptures have portrayed them as epitome of spirituality. In Rig Vedic age, women used to enjoy equality and freedom like their counterparts. With the emergence of social evils such as sati system, Devdasi, polygamy, Johar practice, purdah system, patriarchal society, gradually, women started to be treated badly and unequal to men. In medieval time, we have powerful women like Noor Jahan, Gul Badan Begum, Roshan Aara who have had immense influence on administration. But only royal family women were being allowed to go out freely and live life as per their choice.

In the beginning of 18 century, some English educated open minded people like Raja ram Mohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Swami Vivekananda started to raise flag against the women issues. They advocated for the women education and stood up for their participation in political affairs. Self consciousness and spread of education has led to their progress gradually. Since then, women have proved in almost all fields their capacity.

There is no doubt in this, 21 century woman is more confident, independent and less vulnerable as earlier. They have hold key post in strategic areas and have reached to the new height of success. Yet, she has to face the problem of domestic violence, gender discrimination and sexual abuse, inequality, rape etc. An idea of women condition can be taken from this data: India has been kept on 112<sup>th</sup> place among 153 countries in Gender Gap Index of 2020- (WEF, 2020), in Thomson Reuters Foundation Survey -India has been said most unsafe place for the women in the world, on an average 88 rape cases are reported daily in India, one in three women has to face the problem of physical or sexual violence daily. As per the latest report of National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), over 4 lakh cases have been reported against women in 2019. Women are neither safe inside home (face problem of domestic violence, rape by relative), nor outside the home (face the problem of eve teasing, sexual abuse, harassment at



workplace, unequal pay for equal work etc).

It is being reported from all over the world that incidence of crime against women has increased. This is happening due to economic insecurity, isolation, restrictions on outing, fear of job and business loss. All these things have led to depression, sleep impairment, stress, anxiety and other psychiatric issue. Although, all the section of the society have been facing the bad outcomes of lockdown. But all are agreed that women and children have to bear more burnt of lockdown throughout the world. According to World Health Organization, there is a sharp rise in the number of domestic abuse cases across the Europe during lockdown. There has been registered 66% increment in the emergency calls by domestic abuse suffered women in the month of April only in comparison to last year. As per Centre for Disease control and Prevention, 1 in 3 women during lockdown has faced the domestic violence from their partners.

In developing countries, women condition is more dismal. 18 researches have been done regarding this; all have shown spike in cases of violence against women during lockdown. India has also seen a sharp rise in the number of domestic violence cases against women. While it is being reported from China that more couples are applying for divorce. Moreover, United Nation Population

Fund has warned that 31million additional cases of domestic abuse may come out if situation will remain so. Let us analyze the situation in India. The covid-19 has far reaching negative long term impact on all the section of the society. The impact is likely to be more devastating on women. Wide spread job and income loss, income insecurity among families and uncertainty in future due to lockdown have increased the rates of sexual exploitation and child marriage. Stress on families, particularly on those living in big towns, have increased the incidence of domestic violence.

Majority of us had to remain stick at home for around 6 months without work. People either did not get full pay or pay at all. Pandemic have made people out of money as lakhs of people have been rendered jobless. According to Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, around 122 million people had been forced to leave their job in April month in India. Moreover, unemployment and inflation rate are on its peak in some last decades. This is reflected in the priority of families such as how much expenditure on food, school fee. Normally it is the women and children especially the girl child who are denied of their due. India is a highly patriarchal society and patriarchy norm is, women get everything in last whether food, health, education. Hence, many women may fell prey of malnutrition, hunger; many girl student may pull back of school.



Nothing is important than human interaction. It is important for all round development of the person. But, this interaction has become too long due to lockdown that instead of relieving tension and anxiety, it itself has become one of the cause of stress, discord and tension among couples and families. Working class women has to manage both domestic work and their profession. They generally used to get their most of domestic chores by maid. Since maid is not coming due to lockdown hence they have to do everything themselves. Emergence of work from home, online work is quite stressful as people are not used to of it. In a patriarchal society, men are not expected to do the work because the burden of domestic work is usually shared by women. Changing nature of Job with increasing burden of domestic work has doubled the responsibility of women and creating a lot of anxiety, stress among them.

Women who are house wife have lost the little private space which modern life style has provided them due to lockdown as all are staying at home. Married women who have been already facing the problem of violence cannot get rid of it due to these reasons: cannot go out of home, don't have access to Wi-Fi and internet to complain online, there is constant much more proximity to their abusers. Most of women even don't have people with whom they can talk to. Everyone requires a bit private place to unwind herself/himself. This kind of unwinding is not happening because of lockdown. Initially it was good, even a opportunity to spend time with family but this pleasure is going; now it's like, over loaded electric bulb too much charged with interaction that it tends to fuse out.

Sudden outbreak of lockdown and subsequent announcement of lockdown has added to the agony of migrant laborers who already have been spending life in much misery in the host place. Out of fear, they star to rush to their home on foot covering miles of distance with minimal availability of food and water. Not even this, they have been treated inhumanly in the way by police and also got inhospitable environment in their home town. People coming from Covis-19 hit areas hat to face more prejudices. It is more difficult to battle psychological and mental prejudices than the physical one. As per World Bank report, 40 million internal migrant laborers had suffered due to lockdown in India. A good number of migrant labors constitute women.

Pregnant women are also facing severe problem due to lockdown as they can't go out to access routine medical checkup out of fear of virus infection. Problem of anxiety, insecurity, financial distress, starvation, exhaustion, denial of medical care has added up to the problem further. . Constant fear is also impacting the person in the womb.

There has been seen spike in the number of domestic violence cases due to ban on liquor shop during lockdown. It is being reported that people who are addicted of alcohol



(mostly male and poor people- daily wager, rickshaw pullers, vendors etc.) beat their wife out of frustration. After some week this ban was lifted, some women rights expert warned that this move would fuel to domestic violence cases especially when male are staying at home due to lockdown.

Another section hardly hit by the pandemic is ASHA workers and nurses (mostly female). They have been working on frontline without caring for their life that too for longer hours than normal days. Moreover, they have been facing prejudices from the neighbors sometimes even from their own family members.

Unemployment has been increasing; women are being fired more than men. In a family where man is not working and woman is, ego hassles might also be there as in a patriarchal society it is very difficult to accept woman works and man does not.

Another problem is, we neither have culture of accessing to counselors nor enough number of counselors. There seems to be very little attention is being paid to this. No one is talking about the violence which women has been suddenly forced to face. There is no avenue available for women even to vent their feeling

Lockdown created the situation like Islands of people living in same house who are not able to connect. Best remedy for stress is regarded more connection. But, this remedy is not working in pandemic as this unprecedented situation is happening because of more attachment.

Fact is there is no cure still. Until the vaccine is developed and access to all is ensured, which is next to impossible, risk is going to be persisting. Situation probably will get worse. Because when economy takes a hit, it is women and children who are pushed back. Women, who are not educated, completely dependent on male may find them 10-15 years back.

It's a very tough time for the policy maker to take care of economy and health together. There is a need to take holistic view of health i.e. mental and physical both. Govt. approach should be very soft and full of empathy. It should be taken as serious as rehabilitation done after a war. Civil society, media and other stakeholders should take concerted efforts to educate people about mental health. Need of the hour is to train more people in dealing with anxiety and stress so as to come up a strong individual. Important thing is, people by now has realized that house work is as valuable as other. Attitude towards domestic work will also change and dignity for labour will develop among men.



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